



## Utah Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Guidance Activities Results Report (Large Group) 2007-2008

**School:** Grand County Middle School

**Target Group:** whole school (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade)

**Target Group selection is based upon:** National Career Development Guidelines, Competency 4:

Awareness of the benefits of educational achievement. And Competency 5: Awareness of the relationship between work and learning. Grand County School Board Goal I: Student Achievement: All GCSD students shall receive best-practices, research-based instruction enabling them to meet district, state and national standards of education. Grand County Middle School goal re: student motivation. Middle School Comprehensive Guidance Goal III: To help students master motivation and effort as the link between their potential and their future.

### ABSTRACT

The task of the Middle School counselor is always to bridge the gap between current goals and objectives, and a future that for many Middle School students seems so far away. The purpose of this Action Plan is to evaluate the effectiveness of the **Reality Town** experience in demonstrating to students the relationship between their **current** academic achievement and their **future** career options. For the past two years, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students' **Reality Town** career choices have been based on their First Trimester GPA's. Students must have minimum Grade Point Averages to qualify for the **level of training** their career interests demand. A student with a "C" average cannot be a physician for **Reality Town**, for example, because their current GPA is not sufficient to enable them to enter med school. **Reality Town** includes a Post-Simulation Wrap-Up in which students answer (in written form, in their **Reality Town** handbooks) various questions about their **Reality Town** experience. Our plan is to analyze students' answers to three of these questions in particular, to see if students have integrated the basic lesson about "the grades-careers connection". Our expectation is that at least a majority of students will have understood the grades-careers connection by the end of their **Reality Town** experience.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### Introduction (the Why)

- DRSL – Students will understand that higher levels of academic achievement will qualify them for correspondingly higher levels of career training (vocational school, college, graduate school), that lead to better-paying careers.

#### Participants (the Who)

- Number of Students Participating – approximately 230.
- 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

#### Method (the What, When and Where and How)

- Guidance Lesson Content – The connection between current academic achievement and future career possibilities is emphasized again and again in the CTE Introduction Lessons, specifically in Lessons #1 through #7, Lessons #10, 13a and 13b, 14, 17 and 19. These are: the *Real Game* Lessons: The Dream, The World of Work, What's My Line, and Reality Check. In the Small Group SEOP (which is also the Orientation to the Comprehensive Guidance Program in August for parents and students), I emphasize that the rationale for the entire CCGP Program is helping students understand why they need to achieve **now**, to prepare for their future.

This connection is strongly reinforced in the SEOP interviews themselves. Students' initial **Reality Town** career choices (based on current levels of academic achievement) are made in these interviews; we emphasize *that in order to "keep" these careers (for Reality Town itself), students must keep their grades up.*

This connection is emphasized again repeatedly, in the **Reality Town** Prep Lessons, specifically *My Life Path*, *Personal Fact Sheet (resume writing)*, and *Employment Application*. The connection is made completely explicit in the *Employment Application* Prep Lesson in

Science classes, in which students have three things in front of them: their career choices, their GPA, and the **Reality Town Career List** which details the training requirements for various careers. Students are forced to make career choices/changes based on their current readiness for various levels of training.

Finally, this connection is underscored during the **Reality Town** simulation itself, in which students discover they can't afford the lavish lifestyle they've chosen; or they simply run out of money before visiting every booth, and must go to Financial Counseling to find a second job.

- Curriculum and Materials – CTE Introduction Lessons (listed above); SEOP interview form and process; **Reality Town** – Prep Lessons (listed above), the simulation itself, **Reality Town** student handbooks (including Wrap-Up questions within).
- Project Start and End Dates – Start August, 2007. End February or March, 2008.
- Class or Subject in Which the Lesson will be Presented – See **Method** (above). CTE Introduction Lessons are presented in TLC Business and Technology classes, or in the computer lab. **Reality Town** Prep Lessons happen in the core classes for each grade level – English, History, Science, and Math. SEOP interviews happen in the Counselor's Office. The **Reality Town** simulation happens on February 22, 2008 in the gym, and the Wrap-Up happens in homeroom teachers' rooms.
- Evaluation Methods – How will the results be measured? - After students participate in the **Reality Town** simulation in the gym, they return to their homerooms to complete the Wrap-Up under the direction of their homeroom teachers. We plan to analyze students' written answers to three specific questions from *My Reality Town Experience* in their handbooks (part of the Wrap-Up). These questions are: #16 How do you think school grades effect career choices? #21 Were you happy with your career (job) choice? Why or why not? #25 Will graduating from high school help you to get a better job?  
In analyzing answers to these questions, we are looking for "positive" responses that would indicate that students understand the connection between current academic achievement and future career options. We plan translate these answers into data: What percentage of students gave a "positive" answer to at least one of the above questions? Is there a difference in the percentage of "positive" answers from 7<sup>th</sup> grade versus 8<sup>th</sup> grade?
- Counselor(s) - Tom Edwards, Counselor. Tamara Larsen, Paraprofessional.
- Curriculum and Materials Used – See above.

## RESULTS

227 students participated in the **Reality Town** simulation this past Friday, February 22, 2008 (only 6 absences!). Out of this number, 39 students didn't answer the questions in *My Reality Town Experience* from the Wrap-Up, either refusing to participate or not having enough time to complete the Wrap-Up. This left a population of **188 students who gave written answers** to most of the Wrap-Up questions. Out of these 188, **168 students gave what we considered to be "positive" answers to at least one of the three questions above.** To be considered a "positive" answer, student responses had to include something about grades or graduation from high school having a positive effect on future career possibilities.

**This number (168) represents 72% of the total student body, or 74% of the students who participated in the Reality Town simulation, or 89% of the students who gave written responses to the Wrap-Up questions.**

Out of the 188 students who gave written answers, **3 students gave what we considered to be "negative" answers to the questions. This number (3) represents a tiny fraction of 1% of both the total student body and the students who participated in Reality Town, and 1.5% of the students who gave written responses to the questions.**

Out of the 188 students who gave written answers, **17 students gave either no answer to the particular questions above, or gave an "inadequate" answer – one that did not convey their understanding of what we are calling "the grades-careers connection".** (This figure [17 students] does not include the 22 students in one particular homeroom who didn't give written answers to the Wrap-Up questions because they didn't have

time to finish.) This figure (17) represents 7% of the total student population, ~7.5% of the students who participated in *Reality Town*, and 9% of the students who gave written responses to the questions.

**Overall, the results indicate that a majority of students – 72% to 89% depending on how you figure it – understand that better grades in school will lead to more career possibilities later in life.**

We found that question #21 in the Wrap-Up wasn't at all illuminating in terms of our study; the above percentages are based on students' answers to question #'s 16 and 25 only.

## DISCUSSION

A majority of students – 72% of the student body, and 89% of the students who answered the questions in our study – said there's a positive connection between the grades they're getting now and the career opportunities they'd have in the future. In connecting grades to future opportunities, students mentioned opportunities to get a degree, to go to college, to get more training. Other students said that more education and better grades would somehow show their character, or their discipline, or make them "smarter". In commenting on the need to graduate from high school (question #25 in particular), many students mentioned that most careers these days require a high school diploma.

In answering these questions, ***very few students wrote explanations that demonstrated, in detail, the precise connection between grades and post-secondary training opportunities: namely, that better grades in high school satisfy the entrance requirements for a greater variety of post-secondary schools: vocational schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges.....and that it is the training from these institutions that will give them access to the careers they want.***

In other words, a majority of students do know there's a positive connection between school achievement and future career opportunities. While this is a good foundation on which to build, many students don't really understand how it all connects, or why. Students can't motivate themselves through a four-year high school curriculum – much less launch themselves into post-secondary education – without understanding more clearly where they want to go and what they need to do to get there. Getting good grades is a vital part – but only a part – of this process.

We need to continue to educate both students and their parents about all the steps in the process connecting academic achievement to post-secondary education to career opportunities. We need to continue to demystify post-secondary education for students and parents who may regard high school graduation – to say nothing of college – as foreign (and frightening?) territory. It can only be easier for students to motivate themselves, and easier for their parents to help them, if they understand more clearly why they need to be motivated, what they need to be motivated for, and where they are going.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Edwards, Counselor  
Grand County Middle School  
Moab, Utah  
6 March, 2008



## Utah Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Closing the Gap Results Report (Small Group) 2007-2008

**School:** Grand County Middle School

**Target Group:** 7<sup>th</sup> grade students

**Target Group selection is based upon:** GCMS school goal: To increase student motivation for academic achievement. GCMS Comprehensive Guidance Goal III: To help students master motivation and effort.

### ABSTRACT

PART I: This is a continuation of last year's Guidance Activities Action Plan (Large Group). The purpose of this plan is continued evaluation of the effectiveness of the SEOP interview, 1) in identifying student patterns of interest and ability 2) in setting goals that fit the student, and 3) in motivating the student to work on those goals.

We are working with the 7<sup>th</sup> grade population, using the same SEOP Evaluation Form that we created and used last year. This form is given to students and parents to fill out anonymously, at the conclusion of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP interview. [See attached form.] Data from last year's 7<sup>th</sup> grade forms, is compared with this year's 7<sup>th</sup> grade data. The data shows that parents and students rate this year's 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP interviews as more effective than last year's, both in terms of identifying student patterns of interest and ability, and in terms of setting educational and career goals that are congruent with the student. The effectiveness of the SEOP process in motivating students to **work on** goals set in the SEOP interview, is less conclusive and will require some explanation.

PART II: As another measure of student motivation for academic achievement, we want to measure the percentage of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students completing goals set in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP interview. We would like to establish baseline data for goal completion as a measure of student motivation, to compare this data year-to-year, to experiment with different ways of motivating students to complete academic goals. Our intention is to discover ways of successfully motivating students toward goal-directed behavior and academic achievement.

PART III: As a corollary to all the above, we attempted to increase the effectiveness of the SEOP interview by increasing the percentage of parent attendance at these interviews. We sent out a flashy colored flyer to parents (instead of our customary SEOP letter), advertising an iPod drawing for all students whose parents attended the SEOP interview. This effort failed miserably but was a learning experience, as will be explained below.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

**Introduction** (the Why): The ongoing purpose of this project is to create an SEOP interview and process that both students and parents will perceive as relevant to the student's life, and congruent with who the student actually is. The intention is that this perception will then have a positive effect on student attitudes toward the whole SEOP process, and on student motivation to work on SEOP (academic) goals. This is done through basing the student's SEOP goals and objectives on student PATTERNS of interest and ability identified through the CTE Introduction Lessons and the SEOP interview.

- Identify the Utah CCGP Student Outcome or Desired Result for Student Learning – increased student motivation to work toward goals and objectives identified in the SEOP interview.
- Intended Student Behavior – students will meet stated 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP goals.

#### **Participants** (the Who)

- Number of Students Participating/Affected – 7<sup>th</sup> grade students (approximately 110 students).
- Target Group – 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

#### **Method** (the What, When and Where and How)

- Guidance Activity(ies) or Intervention(s) – Last year’s interventions, continued (See 2006-2007 Guidance Activities Action Plan – Large Group):
  - 1) changes to the SEOP form and interview process
  - 2) changes in the scheduling of teaching CTE Introduction Lessons
  - 3) continued use of the post-SEOP interview SEOP Evaluation Form for students and parents

New interventions this year:

- 1) colored SEOP flyer (rather than letter) advertising an iPod drawing for students whose parents attend the SEOP interview
  - 2) rewarding 8<sup>th</sup> graders (\$5.00 each) who met last year’s 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP goals
  - 3) creating an “SEOP Honor Roll” poster to be displayed in the school, with the names of 8<sup>th</sup> graders attaining 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP goals
- Resources/Staff Development Needed – Funding for the financial reward for 8<sup>th</sup> graders, the colored flyer, and the iPod, was allocated last year as “student incentive” funding out of SITLA monies, by the MS CCGP Advisory Committee (School-Community Council).
  - Project Start and End Dates – Start September, 2007. End May, 2008. (It may take us till October, 2008 to finish crunching the numbers on % of SEOP goals completed.)
  - Evaluation Methods – 1) The post-SEOP interview SEOP Evaluation Form that was designed and used last year with 7<sup>th</sup> graders, is used again this year. Data from last year has been compared with data from this year’s 7<sup>th</sup> graders. 2) Comparative data on student accomplishment of SEOP goals set in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade: data from this year’s 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be compared with data from this year’s 7<sup>th</sup> graders.
  - Counselor(s) – Tom Edwards  
Tamara Larsen (Paraprofessional)
  - Curriculum and Materials Used – All the changes to the SEOP form and process from last year’s (2006-2007) Guidance Activities (Large Group) Action Plan have been continued. Please see this plan for details. Curriculum includes the CTE Introduction Lessons #’s 6, 7, 9, 12, and 14, including the use of Utah Mentor and CHOICES Explorer assessments. Use of the SEOP Evaluation Form was also continued from last year. New materials used include the colored SEOP flyer, the iPod reward for parent SEOP attendance, the financial reward for SEOP goal attainment, and the “SEOP Honor Roll” poster.

## RESULTS

Results data will be presented according to the three Parts of the project listed in the abstract.

PART I: Comparative data (last year vs. this year) from post-SEOP interview SEOP Evaluation Forms:

**Question 1: Did this interview successfully identify student patterns of interest and ability?**

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 2006-2007

population – 61

**Yes – 55 (90%)**

**Somewhat – 6 (10%)**

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 2007-2008

population – 82

**Yes – 80 (97%)**

**Somewhat – 2 (3%)**

**Question 2: STUDENTS: Are these goals accurate for you as a person? Do they fit you?**

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 2006-2007

population - 61

**Yes – 49 (80%)**

**Somewhat – 12 (20%)**

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 2007-2008

population – 82

**Yes – 73 (89%)**

**Somewhat – 9 (11%)**

### Question 3: Does this plan make it easier for you to work toward these goals?

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 2006-2007

population – 61

**Yes – 42 (68%)**

**Somewhat – 19 (32%)**

7<sup>th</sup> grade, 2007-2008

population – 82

**Yes – 49 (60%)**

**Somewhat – 25 (30%)**

**No – 8 (10%)**

PART II: As of this date, 15 May, 2008, we now have comparative data on the percentages of this year's 7<sup>th</sup> graders, versus this year's 8<sup>th</sup> graders, who have completed SEOP goals set in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP interview. (\*\*With this year's 7<sup>th</sup> graders we have had to extrapolate a bit, since these goals were made for the whole school year, and the year is not yet over.) With both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, for the purposes of this study we have included only students who have participated in the entire SEOP process, including the TLC Lessons preceding the SEOP interview. In addition, we have included only students who **set a goal that could be measured**. We were somewhat casual about this with this year's 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and we tightened up considerably with this year's 7<sup>th</sup> graders, for the most part helping them set goals **consistent with their career choice, tied to GPA**. To establish whether or not students completed their goals, **we looked at 7<sup>th</sup> grade GPA's only**.

7<sup>th</sup> grade

Target population (measurable goals)

**104 students**

8<sup>th</sup> grade

**101 students**

Number of students completing goal (%)

**\*\*69-80 students (66-77%)**

**65 students (64%)**

Other factors (reward; SEOP Honor Roll)

**No reward or external recognition**

**\$5 for completing SEOP goal  
name placed on SEOP Honor Roll**

**\*\*For this year's 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 69 students completed their SEOP goal, and 11 more (80 students in total) came close enough to be able to complete their goal before the end of the school year. *More 7<sup>th</sup> graders than 8<sup>th</sup> graders (80 versus 65, or 77% versus 64%) completed their 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP goal. And they did so without the \$5 reward, and without having their name posted (SEOP Honor Roll) on the office window.***

PART III: This part of the project failed miserably – the percentage of parent attendance at this year's 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP interviews ***actually fell rather than increased – from 70% last year to 62 % this year!!*** While this was a slight disaster for us, it was also a great learning experience, which will be discussed below.

## DISCUSSION

PART I: The student population that returned Evaluation Forms this year was 82, compared to 61 last year. This year a greater percentage of parents and students felt that the SEOP process successfully identified student patterns of interest and ability – **97% said “Yes” as opposed to 90% last year**. A greater percentage of parents and students felt that goals set in the SEOP interview were accurate for the student – **89% said “Yes” as opposed to 80% last year**. The results of the third question: “Does this plan make it easier for you to work toward these goals?” – require some explanation. For some reason in interviews with some of the most self-motivated students, when explaining how to fill out the Evaluation Form, I began to say, “For example you might put “No” on Question 3, because you might already be motivated to work on these goals without the plan.” I feel fairly confident that my instructions are responsible for unintentionally skewing the results. Assuming that the 8 students who answered “No” did so in response to my comment [above], and if this 10% were added to the 60% who said “Yes”, this results in a **70% “Yes” response to Question 3, slightly higher**



**than the 68% from last year.** Regardless of the validity of this mathematical manipulation, what remains to be worked on are the results of Question 3.

The data indicate that we are doing a nearly perfect job of assessing student patterns of interest and ability. Taken as a package, the CTE Introduction Lessons that (in our process) precede the 7<sup>th</sup> SEOP interview, the SEOP form, the SEOP interview itself – all of this is a good assessment tool that, for now, does not need to be adjusted.

A significant and growing majority of parents and students (89% as opposed to 80% last year) believe that the SEOP process is helping students set accurate career and educational goals. I believe this percentage isn't closer to 100% because of several mitigating factors: students' continued desire at this age to attach themselves to "fantasy" career goals, to want to be who they "aren't" as opposed to who they are, or to simply want to do what parents or relatives are doing for a living; student uncertainty about being able to maintain current levels of achievement so far into the future; and general uncertainty about goals projected so far into the future. Given these factors, which I believe are real, it may be too much to expect this percentage to get much higher.

The results of Question 3, at best a slight increase in "Yes" responses, indicate that **the SEOP process and interview are helpful in motivating about two-thirds if the student body, to work toward SEOP goals.** Put another way, we still have work to do with about a third or more of the students.

PART II: The data here show a positive trend: in our second school year of tracking goals completion, more students are completing goals set in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP interview, **despite a lower percentage of parents attending this year's 7<sup>th</sup> grade SEOP interviews, and despite the lack of any external reward for this year's 7<sup>th</sup> graders.** There are various possible explanations for this: the 7<sup>th</sup> graders are a more motivated bunch of students, the Counseling Department itself is more focused on communicating the issue of goals completion, the Counseling Department is more clear with students and parents about **why** goals completion is important. The data also suggest that at least for the population of students completing SEOP goals, motivation may be more **intrinsic** than we had supposed, i.e., less dependent on an external reward. Our intention is to continue to track, each year, percentages of SEOP goals completion, and to continue to experiment with motivators for students. It is still our belief that goal-directed behavior learned in Middle School and continued through High School, is the path by which students successfully enter post-secondary education.

PART III: The idea of sending out a flashy colored flyer to parents was first proposed in a Steering Committee Meeting in May, 2007. We had SITLA funding set aside for "student incentives", and the flyer, the iPod, and rewards for 8<sup>th</sup> graders who met their 7<sup>th</sup> grade goals, seemed to fit into this category. It seemed like a great idea at the time. The flyer would simultaneously give parents their student's scheduled SEOP time, and advertise the iPod drawing; their student's name would be entered into the drawing if at least one parent attended the SEOP interview. The thinking behind this effort was that **students would bug their parents to attend the interviews**, thus increasing the percentage of parent attendance.

In the December, 2007 Steering Committee Meeting we discussed why this didn't work. The Committee gave the following feedback: the flyer was too flashy; too much flash and not enough substance; not enough information on what an SEOP interview actually **is**; and the information that was there, got lost in the flash; parents didn't understand what they were being asked to attend, or why it was important.

Discussion in this meeting continued, with changes that we will implement next year that will be part of next year's Closing the Gap Project. We plan to continue to make significant efforts to increase parent attendance at SEOP interviews, because we believe that parental knowledge of and participation in the SEOP process and student goals and objectives, **does increase student completion of these goals.**